



# IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Idaho West Nile Virus Update**

Three Idaho residents, 21 horses, two birds and a dog tested positive for West Nile virus in Idaho during the past week. This brings the state's total number of West Nile reports to 12 people, 87 horses, 12 positive birds and a canine for 2005.

“We are continuing to see a large number of cases being reported, which indicates that mosquitoes which spread West Nile virus remain very active,” says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, Deputy State Epidemiologist. “Until we start experiencing some hard frosts, we encourage people to fight the bite of mosquitoes and protect themselves from West Nile virus.”

There have been no human deaths in Idaho from West Nile virus, but nationally 29 people have died from West Nile infections in 2005. So far this year West Nile virus has been found in 13 Idaho counties, which includes: Ada, Adams, Blaine, Canyon, Gem, Gooding, Elmore, Jerome, Lincoln, Owyhee, Payette, Valley and Washington Counties. During the past week, Jerome was added to the list for the first time with an infected bird and a dog testing positive in that county. The dog reportedly survived the infection and is recovering.

Dogs and cats do not usually become ill from West Nile infection. Although rare, canine cases have been documented nationwide. West Nile virus testing in dogs should only be considered in those animals with a severe illness. There is no vaccine for dogs or cats.

**(more)**

West Nile virus was first discovered in the United States in 1999 in the New York City area. Since then, the virus has spread westward and can be found throughout the country. Last year, 11 of Idaho's 44 counties reported West Nile activity.

To protect themselves from mosquito bites, Tengelsen advises people to:

- Insect-proof their homes by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on their property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk; and
- Report dead birds to your local Fish and Game office.

Although West Nile virus does not usually affect most animals, it often causes severe illness in horses and certain species of birds. Although there is not a vaccine available for people or household pets, there are several vaccines for horses. Approximately one-third of horses which contract West Nile virus will die, so horse owners are encouraged to contact their veterinarian about vaccinating their animals. Horse owners who suspect West Nile viral infection in their animal should contact their veterinarian immediately.

Additional information about the virus is available from the Department of Health and Welfare's web site at <http://www.westnile.idaho.gov>. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Urban Pest Management program also has information available on steps to prevent home-grown mosquito infestations. Information is available on ISDA's web site at <http://www.idahoag.us>.

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**(Editors: For information about human infection, please contact Tom Shanahan, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, 334-0668; Laurie Boston, Southwest District Health, 455-5325; Dave Fotsch, Central District Health, 327-8639; or Monie Smith, South Central District Health, 737-5978. For additional information about West Nile infections in horses, please contact Wayne Hoffman at the Idaho Department of Agriculture at 332-8671. )**